

The Look Of Bolero

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Rise and fall is a crucial feature of bolero. Begin each measure in a lowered position with soft knees. Rise to a height at the end of the long first step (the slow), lower a little for a small second step (the first quick), and then lower more for a medium third step (the second quick). You are now low and ready for the next side step. The rise and fall is in the body, not in the feet and ankles. Again, step well to the side on the slow in a lowered position. Don't rise as you step, but step and then rise to two straight legs. The two quicks are not just a rock and recover, but take a small step, really just placing the foot in preparation for a substantial third step. It might feel like "step, rise, push, crash."

A second key feature of bolero is a heaviness, an inertia, and a connectedness between the partners, from one body, through the arms, to the other body. So you don't just take the steps described above. You have tone that connects you to your partner, and each helps the other take each step. There is a dragging kind of feel and a consequent smooth flow. Especially during the "quick, quick," he pulls and then she pulls. Maybe it's like swinging on a double playground swing: he pumps and then she pumps.

Third, bolero makes much use of body rotation. As you step to the side on the left foot, rotate a little left face. As you step back with the right, keep that rotation—we are using contra-body movement. In rumba, you tend to dance square to your partner, but in bolero, you dance at an angle, always rotating. Bob Powers, an accomplished ballroom instructor, says that we don't use a lot of body sway. We don't shape to our partners. We maintain an erect posture and turn on the long axis of the body— always moving, always at an angle, always turning. He also emphasizes "fast feet/slow body." During the slow count, get your foot out there, but let the body lag behind and slowly flow over the whole two beats. Bolero is slinky. The body never stops; it stays in motion.